DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 871 IR 054 623

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TITLE Public Libraries and Cultural Diversity. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, Syracuse, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-IR-92-11
PUB DATE May 93
CONTRACT RI88062008
NOTE 4p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology, 4-194 Center for Science and Technology, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-4100 (free).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Biographies; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Pluralism; Demography; *Ethnic Groups; Librarians; Library Collection Development; Library Development; *Library Services; Minority Groups; *Multicultural Education; *Public Libraries; *Resource Materials; Social Change; Urban Culture; Users (Information)
IDENTIFIERS California (Berkeley); California (San Jose); ERIC Digests; Examples; Language Minorities; *Multicultural Materials

ABSTRACT

Libraries nationwide are serving increasingly diverse communities as the changing face of America is reflected in the changing information needs of diverse patrons. A key issue in serving the multicultural community is adopting a revised version of collection development. Materials in the native languages of ethnic and language minorities, biographies representing different ethnicities, and resources for the young are necessary. A commitment to expanding their own cultural awareness is required for library administrators and librarians. The commitment to improving service to diverse communities must be reflected in the mission statements and objectives of libraries. In addition, library staff must represent the diversity of the community. Case studies of multicultural efforts at the Berkeley (California) Public Library and the San Jose (California) Public Library illustrate some ways in which the library can reach out to the diverse community. When a library has insufficient diversity among staff members, members of ethnic communities should be invited to serve as resources and advisors to the library. (Contains 14 references.) (SLD)

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May 1993

ED358871

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Public Libraries and Cultural Diversity

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Introduction

Libraries nationwide serve increasingly diverse communities. A recent Census Bureau report (1992) predicts that the white population of the United States, currently 75%, will shrink to 53% by 2050. Hispanics are expected to increase from 4 million (9%) to 81 million (21%). Asian/Pacific Islanders, who currently account for 3% (9 million), are expected to constitute 11% (41 million). African Americans, who make up 12% (32 million) of the population at present, will nearly double in number, to 62 million (16%). The American Indian population will more than double, from 2.2 million to 4.6 million. In some cities these projections are already a reality. In Oakland, California, for example, only one person in three is white; in San Francisco, the figure is one in two.

The changing face of the American population is reflected in the changing library and information needs of public library patrons. Diverse communities need different types of materials than what has traditionally been available.

Libraries must also commit themselves to diversity through management decision making, by educating staff of the needs of changing communities, and by diversifying staff so that the communities' ethnic populations are represented by library employees.

Issues

A key issue in serving the multicultural community is the need to adopt a revised vision of collection development. Diverse communities need materials in the native language of ethnic minorities, biographies representing different ethnic backgrounds, picture books featuring characters that reflect the many ethnicities in this country as well as the white majority, and resources that encourage young adults to research and take pride in their cultures. Diversity in collection development is important for promoting public awareness even when the community is *not* diverse.

Advice on developing collections for diverse user groups appears in the public and school library literature. Van Duyne and Jacobs (1992) describe the role of an English as a Second Language collection in one public library's efforts to help reduce prejudice. Pauletta Bracy (1992) discusses the need for school librarians and other educators to respond by actively seeking out educational materials that reflect the many cultures present in the schools, and motivating students and faculty to learn about and appreciate those other cultures. Helen Williams (1991) describes the many benefits of making multicultural books an integral part of the school curriculum, and offers an annotated list of collection development aids. *School Library Journal* has been publishing a series of annotated lists of videos highlighting cultural diversity (Mandell, 1992). *Booklist* regularly offers annotated lists of fiction highlighting different ethnic groups.

There are also fundamental philosophical issues which must be considered as libraries reach out to their changing communities. Perhaps most critical is a commitment on the part of library administrators and librarians to expanding their own cultural awareness. For a library to best serve the diverse population, the vision of who the library serves and the needs of those patrons must be established and supported from top management to entry-level positions. If management sets the tone for expanding the patron base, all staff will be encouraged to follow suit. Shelley Quezada (1992) emphasizes the importance of making mainstream library activities accessible to underserved populations, rather than falling into the pattern of offering token programs aimed at minority patrons. Working with a trainer or facilitator who specializes in racism awareness or cultural diversity training can help all library employees to examine their own beliefs, learn to be aware of and appreciate other cultures, and see the need for making library services available to the entire community, especially those who have been traditionally underserved.

A library's commitment to improving service to diverse communities must be reflected in its mission statement, goals, and objectives which, in turn, must be reflected through administrative and budgetary decisions. Rhonda Rios Kravitz, Adelia Lines and Vivian Sykes (1991) offer practical advice for adjusting library services, including dealing with staff and community reluctance, planning organizational change, reallocating resources, and devising and implementing collection development policies with input from staff and community, and ensuring that those changes are reflected in the library's budget and materials selection policy.

A third issue is the need for library staff to more fully represent the diversity of our country. Library schools need to focus on the recruitment of minority students. Mentor programs linking minority library school students with minority librarians can offer needed support to students entering a profession where they are underrepresented. Management programs, aimed at encouraging minority librarians to successfully make the step into supervisory positions, are another approach to encouraging diversity within the profession.

Planning for Diversity: Case Studies

The Berkeley (California) Public Library, in an effort to improve services to Berkeley's diverse community and to promote cultural awareness among staff, formed its Multiethnic Committee in 1988. The committee itself is culturally diverse and includes staff from all levels of library service, from aides to librarians. The Multiethnic Committee's charge is:

> To ensure that the library and information needs of African Americans, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islanders and American Indians be met. In keeping with this responsibility, the Multiethnic Committee shall assess and advise Berkeley Public Library's stance toward the diverse community it serves. The Multiethnic Committee shall support an ongoing program of staff training and awareness which will be reflected in programming, publicity, collection development and the mission of the library.

The four ethnic groups named in the committee's charge were selected based on a report by the Rand Corporation (Payne & others, 1988) for the California State Library. This report cites these four groups as being particularly underserved in California libraries.

Although the Multiethnic Committee has specific tasks, one of its most important functions is to keep all library employees aware of and focused on the committee's charge. Activities planned by the committee to improve cultural awareness among staff have included workshops on racism and anti-Asian attitudes, lunchbag meetings to celebrate the cultures of different ethnic groups, and reading and reflection sessions.

The committee's efforts extend beyond the education and enrichment of Berkeley Public Library staff. Each year, a subcommittee produces the Multiethnic Calendar, which highlights holidays, festivals and historical events celebrated by African Americans, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islanders and American Indians. The calendar, now in its fifth year of publication, has been sold nationwide to schools, other libraries, and private companies. Working with the graphics division of the American Library Association, the committee has just completed a book of program ideas to accompany the calendar. *Celebrate American's diversity* provides historical background, current traditions and program ideas for all ages for each event listed in the calendar.

Finally, the Multiethnic Committee ensures that the library's displays and fliers accurately and sensitively represent the community. By arranging displays highlighting the four targeted groups, the committee provides a visible reminder to staff and community of the ever-increasing need to make the cultures of ethnic minorities present in the daily life of the community. The presence of these displays also prompts other staff and community members to set up similar displays. Likewise, examination of library-produced fliers and brochures by the committee has resulted in thoughtful, non-stereotyped promotional materials, and increased cultural awareness among all staff.

The San Jose Public Library has implemented a multifaceted program aimed at improving the library's services to the extremely diverse community it serves. An article by library director James Fish (1992) describes the library's plans, obstacles encountered, and programs implemented. This library's commitment to serving its multicultural population is reflected in its mission, vision and values statements, an ambitious and detailed work plan (including such projects as revised cataloging), its budget allocations, and the creation of positions such as Multicultural Services Librarian. A recently established Multicultural Committee focuses on staff awareness/cultural responsiveness, outreach/program series, recruitment, and collection development.

The efforts of both Berkeley Public Library and San Jose Public Library to improve service to the ethnic minority community are aided by the demographics of the Bay Area; with an ethnically-diverse staff to draw upon, forming a multiethnic committee is a relatively simple matter. But how can communities without a diverse staff implement a program to raise cultural awareness among library employees?

If a library has insufficient ethnic minorities among the existing staff to form a committee, members of ethnic communities may be invited to serve as resources and advisors. Senior centers, youth groups, religious organizations and cultural centers are often pleased to be invited to share their cultures. By working with library staff, who have a clear understanding of the library's mission and resources, community advisory members can offer a fresh look at what the community would like from its library, as well as make library staff aware of the particular customs and traditions of their ethnic group. Working with these groups may also help to promote the library as a place of employment, thereby diversifying the staff.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RI88062008. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or ED.